

Agricultural Economic Development Initiatives for the Metro Vancouver Region

Prepared for:

Metro Vancouver Regional District

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1.0 Executive Summary

The purpose of this work was to recommend one or more feasible opportunities for agriculture economic development for regional collaboration that involve several private/public agencies and where the benefits accrue to multiple agriculture sectors and across the Metro Vancouver region. The focus of the work was to promote agriculture viability for *new and expanding farm and agrifood businesses*, regardless of scale, i.e. any size of farm that is motivated to generate a profit.

A significant number of plans and strategies related to the agrifood industry were reviewed to identify specific initiatives for agricultural economic development and the limitations that may be preventing growth of the local industry. This was followed by interviews with 16 farmers and industry leaders with the intent of substantiating and prioritizing the initiatives. Feedback was also obtained from meetings with the Metro Vancouver Agricultural Advisory Committee. This information was evaluated to identify initiatives that could be practically implemented and potentially improve viability of farm businesses throughout the regional food system.

New farmers are needed. The farm population is aging and there are not enough replacements for those who will likely retire within the next decade. The interviews, which were supported by the plans, indicated that there is a strong need for outreach programs that would provide new and emerging farms and value-added enterprises with critical knowledge and information. These growing businesses can find most of the production oriented information they need online but they are not likely to find or acquire key local knowledge, business skills, or reliable planning data. Connecting with local expertise, in person, will help them avoid costly mistakes which, early on in the development stages, can affect the short-term survival and long-term viability of their businesses.

There is a need to raise the profile of agriculture in the region. Metro Vancouver produces a significant portion of the revenue from primary and value-added production of agrifood products in British Columbia. Producers and processors believe that it is very important to continue to increase consumer awareness of the quality of local food and value of the regional agrifood industry.

Access to land, as well as access to drainage and irrigation infrastructure, and to some extent, access to marketing and distribution systems are challenges for the agricultural industry although many producers have found ways to deal with these on their own farms.

Key Recommendations include:

- Connect regional economic development with the agrifood industry;
- Establish outreach programs for new and developing farmers and value-added producers;
- Create an Agricultural Profile for the region to provide potential investors with key information about the potential opportunities in the region;
- Conduct consumer outreach and education to “tell the good news stories” about the regional agrifood industry and the quality and value of the products produced locally; and
- Organize a Regional Agricultural Economic Advisory body that can provide ongoing input into agricultural development initiatives as conditions change over time.

2.0 Introduction – Background

A review of the local agricultural plans and strategies indicates that there is a common vision for agriculture in the Metro Vancouver region. The visions include common keywords: encourage, sustainable, viable, protect agricultural land, promote agricultural viability, etc. that generally support the expansion of the industry and a desire to create a “welcome business environment for agriculture”, although expressed in different ways.

2.1 Economic Development

Economic development implies a proactive approach to expanding business activity within the sector. Economic development practitioners generally work around two principles:

- Business Retention and Expansion. Generally, it is recognized that about 80% of new economic activity comes from existing businesses, or from investment, within the community.
- Investment attraction. Activities in this area are related to finding external capital to invest in and expand local businesses. Some economic development offices try to attract large individual businesses when, perhaps, strong and well suited smaller enterprises are more likely to relocate and several small and medium-size enterprises will have more of an impact on the local economy.

The third component to making economic development work is targeted communication, aimed at the type of agri-investment desired for the area to promote:

- The types of opportunities that may exist and
- That the place is open for business.

For the sake of identifying agriculture economic development priorities and strategies, it is worthwhile to divide the farms in the region in 3 groups:

- Lifestyle (or hobby) farms: The 2011 Census of Agriculture indicates that 49% of the farms in Metro Vancouver (1,387 of 2,821 farms) generate less than \$10,000 per year in gross annual farm receipts. Although this figure may include developing farms, it does indicate a significant number of lifestyle farmers.
- Developing farms: There is a group of new or developing farms that are attempting to start and grow a farm business. These producers are, to some extent, motivated to generate a profit or to expand production but need “hands-on” knowledge and reliable local information to avoid costly mistakes.
- Mature farms: These farms are, more or less, fully developed. They are generally expanding and amalgamating to some degree. If they do need assistance with economic development, it is likely to be highly specialized and they would probably hire the expertise to fill the gap. These farms have all the resources (land, labour, management and capital) to sustain or grow their businesses.

To achieve the greatest gains in economic development, efforts should be focused on developing farms or mature farms that want to grow their business.

Another key factor that needs to be considered in evaluating economic development initiatives is the age of farmers. There are 4,220 farm operators in the Metro Vancouver region; 56% are over the age of 55. If those farmers retire over the next 20 years, an average of 120 “replacement” farmers, per year, will be required to fill the gap. Agriculture is a complex business, with relatively low profit margins. A high level of management skills are required to succeed.

Based on observations, significant changes in the operation of a farm business occur when there is a change in ownership or control of the farm business. Very often, it is the new owners, who benefit significantly from timely relevant local information; connecting with others in the industry, and workshops that transfer knowledge and help these new businesses avoid expensive mistakes.

Effective economic development takes time. The agrifood industry does not have an industry-wide network so connections need to be established to improve the flow of information into the agriculture community.

3.0 Project Purpose and Methodology

The purpose of the work is to recommend one or more feasible opportunities for agriculture economic development for regional collaboration that involves several private/public agencies and where the benefits accrue to multiple agriculture sectors and across the Metro Vancouver region. The task was to identify potential initiatives through a review of existing agricultural plans, economic strategies and related reports and to test actions for their relevance through extensive interviews with local agriculture and economic experts.

Initially, the scope of work was to promote agriculture viability for small to medium-sized farm operations, however, the focus shifted to the viability of farm and agrifood *businesses*, regardless of scale, i.e. any size of farm that is motivated to generate a profit.

Numerous plans and strategies related to agriculture and economic development produced in the past 10 years were reviewed to identify economic development initiatives (see Appendix A). The Langley Agricultural Viability Strategy was certainly one of the key documents because it is current and comprehensive and it had a greater focus on economic development than many previous plans. The Delta, Richmond, and Surrey plans also noted many of the same issues that could be dealt with, with some resources dedicated to economic development in those areas

The plan review was followed by extensive interviews with a wide range of people involved in the industry: farmers, food processors, Ministry of Agriculture staff, local government staff, economic development officers, and representatives of significant farm organizations and agriculture educational institutions. The interview questions were focused on identifying economic development initiatives that are most feasible and could be accomplished through regional collaboration and the discussions were also tailored to suit the interviewee and their position within the industry. Some interim results were also presented to Metro Vancouver's Agriculture Advisory Committee for additional feedback.

This information was compiled and evaluated to identify agriculture economic development initiatives that could be implemented through a collaborative effort within the region.

4.0 Highlights of the Review and Interviews

At least 14 regional plans and strategies (listed in Appendix A), and a number of related studies and reports, were reviewed to prepare for interviews. The strategies identified a number of specific initiatives for economic development of the local agrifood sector as well as a number of limitations that are challenging growth of the sector within the region: access to land and access to infrastructure (drainage, irrigation and marketing/distribution) being the main challenges.

A total of 16 interviews were conducted with farmers and industry leaders (face-to-face and by telephone). Feedback was also received from attending two meetings with Metro Vancouver staff and with the Metro Vancouver Agricultural Advisory Committee. The interviews and feedback, from the meetings, confirmed and helped prioritize development initiatives and affirmed the challenges, i.e. high cost of and access to land, access to infrastructure such as drainage and irrigation, the aging farm population and ability to develop skilled new farmers to replace those who are retiring. In many cases, there are no easy answers to resolving these challenges at the regional level, however, the industry and individual farmers have found potential solutions at the farm level or within their sector.

Feedback from the industry representatives was prioritized as follows.

4.1 Developing Successful New Farms and Agrifood Businesses

“The industry needs to change its message. Agriculture is undeniably hard work and the returns, on paper, seem to be relatively low, but there are some benefits or pluses that are not often acknowledged. Farmers receive a significant number of tax advantages, including lower property taxes, and exemption from certain levels of provincial taxation, PST, and reimbursement of GST on food production-related expenses, etc. Farmers work at home and, because of that, they can deduct a portion of their household expenses that residential owners do not have the opportunity to do. Farmers grow their own food. They also benefit from capital gains on their property; statistics show that the value of farm assets increases at a level several times higher than the returns from farm operations themselves. Farming is a business can provide a healthy and rewarding lifestyle.”

The aging farm population is a huge issue, not just in this region but, throughout the province. Farmers are getting older and there are not enough new producers coming in to replace them. There are several programs within the Metro Vancouver region that are training prospective new farmers but even the output from these programs will not meet the future demand.

Currently, there are two main sources of new farmers:

- Children of *successful* farmers. Children from struggling farm operations generally have no desire to take over.
- Urban converts. Within this group there are 2 demographics:
 - There is a growing interest amongst the younger generation to produce *their own* food. Some of these people move beyond the community gardens and on to programs like the Kwantlen Polytechnic University’s (KPU) Richmond Farm School and the newly developing Maple Ridge Farm School (a joint effort between KPU and Thompson Rivers University). Student numbers are small compared to the long term needs for new producers but are

- expected, by KPU, to increase quickly in coming years. These students have the challenge of trying to enter the farming business with low levels of equity after graduating from school.
- Early retirees or people who choose to leave urban life. There is a significant group of people who have accumulated significant equity early in their urban careers and simply want to move on to something different. Many of these people have post-secondary education and years of management experience and want to farm, but they approach it as a business first. These are great candidates for outreach programs because they are eager for information and they realize the value of local knowledge within that information mix.

4.2 Farmer Outreach and Education

4.2.1 Direct Knowledge Transfer

“The biggest issue related to agricultural viability is in business skills or lack thereof”.

Most of the information required to plan and develop a new farm operation is available on the Internet, but it is not always easy to find and not easy to determine what is relevant and valuable to a specific farm in the Lower Mainland. Direct contact with local farmers and/or people with expertise will help new farmers and new value added businesses find key relevant production, marketing and regulatory information and help them develop networks and management skills that will improve their chance of success. Increased outreach programs were supported by most, if not all, industry interviews. The easy information is online; the valuable information is with the farmers and resource people next door.

Short courses, like a *Small Lot Agriculture Workshop*, can help new producers avoid very costly mistakes and can point them to information, events and resources that are not always easy to find. These also help to develop networks amongst those producers.

Distribution and access to markets is considered a significant issue for new producers but, at the early stages of farm development, it is a lack of understanding of marketing and distribution systems that prevents producers from accessing and profiting from them. Many farmers have developed their own system of marketing that allows them to sell profitably, even in small volumes, into the Metro Vancouver market. Farm Folk City Folk’s *“Meet Your Maker”* has helped a large number of people and could be expanded. There are two food processing associations in the province: BC Food Processors Association and the Small-scale Food Processors Association. Both of these organizations provide services and programs for food processing at every scale. There are government programs that will help eligible farmers assess the viability of changes to their operation and to assist with business planning.

4.2.2 Mentorship

Some plans mention mentorship as a valuable means of developing new farmers. This was strongly supported by several farmers. Successful farmers who are willing to share their expertise and “tricks of the trade” can certainly help new and developing farmers move towards profit and success much quicker. In some cases, the mentor farmers are also willing to provide access to land, shared use of equipment and on-farm infrastructure (irrigation, buildings, etc.). With the aging population of farmers, this could be a valuable extension planning option for some farmers wanting to slow down or retire. This

can be a huge opportunity for a new farmer to develop the skills to succeed and perhaps work their way into an existing business. However, farmers will certainly be selective in who they work with. They will want to find people who have the same values and ethics towards land stewardship, have management capacity or the capacity to learn and are truly interested in continuing to develop and operate the farm as a successful business enterprise.

4.3 Raising the Profile of Agriculture

4.3.1 Raising Consumer Awareness

“Metro Vancouver is not only the largest and primary consumer market of agrifood products; it is also home to a significant portion, if not the majority, of the dollars of primary and value-added production of agrifood products in B.C.”

Producers and processors believe that it is very important to continue to increase consumer awareness of the quality of local products and the value of the agrifood industry to the regional economy as this will improve demand for their products and therefore increase viability of their businesses.

This was mentioned in almost every interview and almost every plan. Ultimately, consumers demanding local food at the grocery store will force distributors to make more local product available. The BC Food Processors Association (BCFPA) believes that Metro Vancouver is very good at communicating and could help their membership by “telling some of the good news stories” about the world-renowned products that have been developed in the region by some of these companies - again creating more demand for local product. Good news stories will help raise the profile of the industry and perhaps attract new producers. The BCFPA represents large, successful and very innovative food processing corporations, most of which are in the Metro Vancouver region.

4.3.2 Strengthening Connections

In virtually every plan or strategy, there are recommendations to improve the “connections” between the participants in the agri-food sector: connections to consumers and retailers; connections across agriculture commodities, connections between economic development officers.

Developing stronger connections and relationships between economic development initiatives and the agriculture industry is a critical step. It may take time but, if producers see benefits flowing from these initiatives, they will increasingly support it over time.

Stronger connections between commodity groups (generally larger scale farmers) and small lot and specialty farmers will further enhance input into improved ideas for growth in the overall industry. Small scale food processors are struggling to improve these connections but they recognize the value that increased communication, especially in person, to their businesses and to the sector; *word-of-mouth is their most effective tool for marketing their services.*

The BC Food Processors Association specifically stated that the regional government could be very helpful, for them (and for agriculture in general) if they could assist with *“telling the good news stories about the quality of agrifood products in the region”*.

4.4 Access to Land

Access to land is a huge barrier to expanding agriculture economic development. In virtually every plan there is a recommendation to develop and maintain a lease registry. Although some registries may exist online, they are not well used or promoted. Unfortunately for new farmers, when private land becomes available it is very often snapped up by adjacent or nearby larger farms because mature farms have a reputation of treating the land well, paying rent and they are the first ones to know it is available.

Clearly, the availability and high cost of purchasing land is a significant barrier to entry for young or new farmers. Access to land for new farmers will likely come from landowners, government or other agencies, who specifically want to help someone get started. One suggestion made was to work with intensive livestock operators (poultry, for example) who do not necessarily require use of their entire land base. Some of these operators may be willing to help new farmers get started.

In the mid-80's, the Agricultural Land Commission administered the Property Management Program. The program leased out provincially-owned agricultural lands. Many of these properties were small lots created by highway severances. The leases were for a minimum of 10 years with a 10 year renewal option and an option to purchase. With the approval of the Commission, the tenant could build or add improvements to the land so they could build equity over time. When they were ready, they could exercise their option to purchase. If they terminated the lease, the improvements were appraised, purchased and resold to the new tenant by taking back an improvement loan with the new tenant.

4.5 Small Farm Access to Marketing, Distribution Channels and Food Hubs

Access to marketing and distribution systems is mentioned as an issue in many of the local strategies and plans related to food security and small farm development. The concept of food hubs is often recommended as the answer to this issue. However, as noted elsewhere, many farms have developed very strong markets, either direct to consumers, or to restaurants and specialty food stores in Metro Vancouver. Furthermore, the Farmers' Markets and the BC Association of Farmers' Market report that there is steady and significant growth in sales. Interviews with industry organizations, farmers and economic development officers indicate that, while food hubs might address and open up new markets for some producers, they are long term projects. In the short term, other initiatives should be considered and dealt with before, or during, the planning of these larger projects such as:

- Training and education for prospective users of the food hub. Interviews indicate that many of the potential users have a low level of understanding of the food distribution system and marketing into that portion of the regional consumer market that is very keen to support local producers. For example, restaurants have key delivery times. They need to know that the food will be delivered on time so it can be prepared fresh for their peak periods, will be consistent quality, they will get the right volume and it is safe and appropriately inspected, among other conditions.

"Many consumers buy at the farmers markets because they have the opportunity to deal directly with producers. They develop a trust relationship with the producer because they want to know where their food is coming from". This relationship can be lost if small lot producers aggregate their product at a distribution point and do not represent themselves at the market.

- Food hubs essentially displace the “middleman” but there are costs associated with managing and operating the hub. Operating costs could easily exceed the cost of other marketing options because the facility may be handling relatively small volumes. It will likely need to deal with many smaller producers with varying volumes and quality of product. This may lead to the need to develop systems for grading, packaging, labelling (especially for traceability and food safety reasons) and possibly storage. It is likely that deliveries to the hub would be concentrated into 2 to 3 days a week (Thursday through Saturday) because many participants will be working full-time off the farm while they are developing their new enterprise. There was also a producer comment, suggesting that producers from other regions might use cooling and storage facilities at food hubs to temporarily store their products - essentially competing with the local producers.
- There is also the issue of generating the capital to establish the facility (unless there happens to be a suitable facility available). Raising capital to develop the facilities has proven to be a significant challenge in other areas. This inherently turns the project into a long term initiative.
- Food hubs will be seasonal. This increases the unit cost of product moving through them. Another challenge that may arise (and certainly has with communities who want to expand from one to two day Farmers’ Markets to full-time markets) is the inability to attract vendors who can fill the market an extra five or six days a week.
- The facilities ultimately need to have a strong business and governance structure to deal with the issues listed above.

4.6 Access to Irrigation and Drainage Infrastructure

Data from recent land-use inventories, completed by the BC Ministry of Agriculture, indicates there are more irrigated acres of farmland in Metro Vancouver than there are in the Okanagan Valley. Increasing access to irrigation water and improving the ability to drain land, where needed, are important elements to improving agricultural viability for farmers in the Lower Mainland.

Improved access to irrigation and drainage infrastructure is critical to economic development but it is an issue that generally requires long-term capital planning. The challenge is that building infrastructure involves a wide range of government agencies and services and significant financial resources.

5.0 Recommendations

The recommendations below are based on an evaluation of the literature review and industry interviews, combined with experience with successful economic development programs in other areas, primarily South Coastal BC. The recommendations and actions are prioritized based on:

- ✓ Achievability and feasibility. Short-term success with a number of small projects will generate stronger industry support that will help to build and develop larger projects over the long term. Funding requirements and staff commitments are also reduced.
- ✓ Regional collaboration and building on existing initiatives.
- ✓ Promoting the viability of farm and agrifood *businesses*, i.e. any size of farm or value added agrifood enterprise that is motivated to generate a profit.

5.1 Connecting Regional Economic Development with the Agrifood Industry

A relationship and credibility needs to be created between the economic development organization and the agricultural sector. Once producers recognize the benefits from economic development initiatives they tend to cooperate and participate more.

Collaborative Actions:

- Create an ad hoc committee that includes individuals or organizations who are currently involved in encouraging economic growth in the agricultural sector. This could include (among others): Pitt Meadows Economic Development Corporation, Langley Agricultural Advisory Committee (or a staff person responsible for implementation of their Agricultural Viability Strategy), Invest North Fraser, Metro Vancouver, Surrey Agricultural Advisory Committee. Richmond and Delta representatives should be included but may need to come from the farm community. (*Immediate – high priority*).
- Create a presence at the Pacific Agricultural Show. Ultimately, this would be a joint effort of the organizations involved in the committee as described above. The purpose would be to promote new agricultural economic development initiatives, to increase the list of contacts in the industry, and to gain exposure to a very wide range of producers. Producers would also provide feedback and ideas to the committee to further enhance programs and initiatives. It is recognized that this is a significant commitment; however, the annual Pacific Agricultural Show in Abbotsford is the most widely attended industry venue in the province. The attendance on Thursday and Friday is generally larger scale, commodity producers; new and emerging farmers attend on Saturday. (*January 30 to February 1, 2014, very high priority, would require funding for booth space, display and 8 person days of staff and committee time*).

Suggested Partners:

- Ministry of Agriculture
- Economic Development Offices – especially those already involved in Agriculture initiatives.
- Local governments (municipal and regional)
- Farmers' Institutes
- Agricultural Advisory Committees

5.2 Outreach for New and Developing Farmers and Value-Added Producers

5.2.1 Technology and Knowledge Transfer

New and developing farms will benefit significantly from access to relevant local knowledge and technology. Much of this information is available on the Internet, but it is easy to miss the critical aspects. Connecting new and developing farm businesses with people, information, technology, markets, etc., can help them avoid costly mistakes and significantly improve their overall viability.

Many of these programs are already in place but they are not easy to find or they may not appear to be relevant to new producers. Also, new producers are often working full time elsewhere as they develop their business so weekend and evening training and education, during the non-growing season is most beneficial.

Collaborative Actions

Promote and/or create:

- Small Farm Development Programs. The Langley Sustainable Agriculture Foundation's plans to host a Small Lot Agriculture Workshop in the fall of 2013. If possible, organize more of these workshops through the region. These workshops should be used to begin to develop a contact list of new and developing farms in the region. (*October 2013 – post harvest, high priority*).
- Marketing and Distribution workshops for small lot producers. The BC Farmers' Market Association research shows that sales at farmers markets continue to grow but "access to markets" is considered an issue for small lot agriculture in many of the reviewed documents. The interviews indicated that the true issue may be a lack of understanding of the marketing and distribution systems and lack of marketing skills themselves. Farm Folk, City Folks' "Meet Your Maker" program has helped many new and emerging farmers and value added producers establish market connections in Metro Vancouver.
- Business Management Courses for small farms. Many small and developing farms use the "shoebox" accounting system. They leave the books until the end of the year. In a business where the margins are very slim, monitoring sales and expenses must be done on an ongoing basis.
- Development of Small Scale Food Processing Enterprises. Many farms have excess product or sub-grade product that can be processed, on farm, to add value and diversify their product mix. However, there can be a wide range of food safety, regulatory and liability issues associated with these processing activities. The BC Food Processors Association and the Small-scale Food Processors Association have courses, online resources and training modules to help new and emerging plan for and deal with these issues. Even so, these organizations believe there is significant value in increased outreach programming to reduce risk and improve viability for processing businesses.
- "Farm Business Challenges", a cross commodity conference for dealing with non-production issues in the industry. For example, one topic could be farm succession as 56% of farmers in the Metro Vancouver region are over 55 years old.

5.2.2 Mentorship

Encourage, where possible, mentorship agreements. Mentorship certainly has the potential to help create successful new farm businesses. These types of agreements can provide new farmers with access to land, capital (shared equipment, buildings/facilities, irrigation, etc.) and experience and skilled managers with proven success in their business. There are certainly successful farmers who are willing to offer these opportunities but they will be selective in who they choose to work with. They will want to work with people who share their values and visions, are dedicated to the business and have the capacity to succeed, among other things. For the most part, assistance with mentorship is likely limited to referring potential farmers to producers who have expressed interest.

Suggested Partners

A range of organizations and public agency support is essential to develop and host events and training programs that support new and developing farms including the following:

- Ministry of Agriculture
- Local governments (municipal and regional)
- Community foundations and organizations
- Agriculture associations
- Educational institutions
- Pacific Agricultural Show
- BC Institute of Agrologists (as a Professional Development activity for members)

5.3 Agricultural Profile for the Region

5.3.1 Information Packages for Investment Attraction

Most of the regional agricultural area plans were written with the intention of improving conditions, policies and procedures for agriculture – to protect farmland and make farming more viable.

Creating a “welcoming business environment”, by itself, will not result in economic development. There must be some level of pro-active effort to promote and invite new investment in agriculture whether it comes from within the region or is aimed at attraction of new external investment.

There must be some effort to ensure that the right investors are aware that increased agriculture is wanted in the region.

Collaborative Actions

- Develop a package of promotional materials for attracting investment that describes the local agrifood sector. These materials should be done at a regional level because it spreads the cost, it pulls the communities together in terms of agricultural promotion and, more importantly, the boundaries for these investments and opportunities do not necessarily coincide with local government boundaries. This could include:
 - A basic brochure outlining the collaborative initiatives and the programs that they are supporting along with contact information, websites, etc.

- An information package or packages that describe local climate, growing conditions, variations in soils, hours of bright sunlight, markets, opportunities for value-added enterprises and agri-tourism and export market opportunities for products like blueberries. The initial package should be designed or targeted primarily at potential local investors but, it may be necessary to create versions for outside investors.

5.3.2 Recruitment of New Farmers

Historically, and perhaps in the future, the best source of new farmers, may be immigrants. For example, Europeans farm in a very similar climate and the price of resources (i.e. land) doesn't necessarily scare them off. The European economy has many farmers looking for opportunities elsewhere. There are areas, like Belgium, where, if farmers have more than one child, the first one gets the farm; others must look to farm elsewhere. Interest in investing in BC agrifood enterprises is also increasing very rapidly from investors in Asia.

These two areas could represent a third, and substantial, source of new farmers and capital investment in new agrifood enterprises in the future. The statistics show, that every new job created in Canada after 2013, will require an immigrant. Our labor force is shrinking without immigration.

The industry associations are already working closely with agencies associated with promoting export trade in regional food and agrifood products. Even so, there may be opportunities to assist with organization of delegations from other countries.

Collaborative Actions:

- Connect with industry associations and others involved in developing these new exports and investment opportunities to identify potential collaborative methods of assistance.

Suggested Partners

- Export Development and Olympic Legacies, Ministry of International Trade
- Ministry of Agriculture
- Local economic development offices
- Agriculture associations
- Local governments

5.4 Consumer Outreach and Education

In virtually every plan or strategy, there are recommendations to improve the "connections" between the participants in the agrifood sector, from producer to consumer, along with everyone else involved. Producers, including value added processors, believe that increased consumer awareness of local agriculture will improve demand for their product and therefore increase viability of their businesses.

Collaborative Actions

- Develop a strategic plan to communicate the "good news" stories can generate a lot of positive public response which translates into increased support and demand for local food products. For

example, the Comox Valley Economic Development Society's media relations program is based on promoting the area as an agrifood destination.

- Create materials and stories to be published in hardcopy magazines and newspapers in North America and European publications. One European publication (with circulation of over 3 million) sent a reporter over to do an article on the Comox Valley area because it was compared to a popular French destination. This publicity was inexpensive and effective in attracting agri-tourists (especially foodies) to the area and it has generated many enquiries from potential new farmers and value-added investors. It has also created interest and potential new markets for the Comox Valley's products.

Suggested Partners

- Provincial and local governments
- BC Food Processors Association (offered to provide "good news" stories)
- Agricultural associations and farm organizations
- Individual farmers, especially direct farm marketers

5.5 Create a Regional Agricultural Economic Advisory Body

Agricultural economic development opportunities change over time. A regional body could assess and prioritize opportunities on an ongoing basis. Local economic development commissions likely allocate their resources and time based on longer-term strategic plans developed within their organizations. Often, this leaves them limited time and opportunity to "add agriculture to their agenda".

Collaborative Actions

- Creation of a regional cross-commodity body (and scale of farms) would provide another layer of input to identify emerging economic development initiatives as changes occur and/or arise over time. This is a longer term recommendation that will require some planning and facilitation.
- Economic development initiatives could be added to the agenda of local Agricultural Advisory Committees. This may be challenging for some committees because there can be conflict between economic development and land use decisions within the ALR. It also may require a change in the Terms of Reference for many committees which would need to be approved by staff and/or local councils.

Suggested Partners

- Local farm organizations, i.e. Farmers' Institutes (which generally represent large-scale, mature farms) and
- BC Association of Farmers' Markets (which generally include new and developing farms and small scale food processors)
- Local economic development offices
- Local governments

6.0 Funding Sources

Funding is becoming more difficult and there is increasing competition for available projects. The initiatives recommended in this report are, in part, prioritized based on projects that can be completed with minimal funding. In some cases, they may require more local government staff time but, with strong collaborative efforts, the staff time (and the cost of inputs such as printed materials, booth space and displays, etc.) can be spread around. The initiatives are also based on the assumption that increased industry support, over time, will lead to revenues and in-kind contributions from programs which can be used to support applications for future and long-term projects.

Potential funding sources include:

- Growing Forward 2 - specifically the projects administered through the Sustainable Agriculture Management Branch. Note: Growing Forward 2 been approved in principle but the details of individual subprograms have not been fully designed or approved.
- Investment Agriculture Foundation of British Columbia
- VanCity Credit Union, Real Estate Foundation or other funding organizations
- Registration fees for programs

7.0 Appendix A – Major Plans and Strategies Reviewed

Document Title	Source	Date	Author
Agricultural Viability Strategy	Township of Langley	March 2013	Don Cameron and Associates
Metro Vancouver 2040 Shaping Our Future	Metro Vancouver	July 2011	Metro Vancouver
Delta Agricultural Plan – Phase 3 Report	Delta	October 2011	Zbeetnoff Agro- environmental Consulting and Quadra Planning Consultants
Maple Ridge Agricultural Plan	Maple Ridge	December 2009	Zbeetnoff Agro- environmental Consulting and Quadra Planning Consultants
Regional Food System Strategy	Metro Vancouver	February 2011	Metro Vancouver
Local Government Policy Options to Protect Agricultural Land and Improve the Viability of Farming in Metro Vancouver	Metro Vancouver	April 2012	Deborah Curran and Dr. Tracy Stobbe
Agriculture Protection and Enhancement Strategy	City of Surrey	2013	City of Surrey
Agrifood Strategy for Pitt Meadows – Phase 1 and 2	Pitt Meadows Economic Development Corporation	November 2011	From the Ground Up and BMC Management Consultants
The Agricultural Viability Report	Richmond	February 2003	City of Richmond in Richmond Farmers' Institute
Surrey's Underutilized Agricultural Land	Kwantlen Polytechnic University	2012	Kwantlen Polytechnic University Institute for Sustainable Horticulture
New City Market Draft Business Plan	Vancouver	July 2005	newcitymarket.org
The Economy of Local Food in Vancouver	Vancouver	August 2009	Chris Hild for the Vancouver Economic Development Commission
What Feeds Us: Vancouver Food Strategy	Vancouver	January 2013	City of Vancouver
Minutes of workshop on "Strengthening the Regional Food Network in a Global Economy"	Metro Vancouver	April 2010	Staff/Agriculture Committee
Southwest British Columbia Bioregional Food System Design and Implementation Plan	Kwantlen Polytechnic University	April 2013	Kent Mullinix

